

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel claims 1-43 without prejudice.

Please add the following claims:

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1 44. (New) A method of connecting two parties in real time, the method comprising:
2 providing a list of information providers, the list including an indication of a current
3 availability status for each information provider; and,
4 in response to a user selecting an information provider from the list, establishing a real
5 time communication connection between the information provider and the user.

1 45. (New) The method as described in claim 44, further comprising, after establishing
2 the real time communication connection between the information provider and the user,
3 changing the indication of the current availability status for the information provider.

1 46. (New) The method as described in claim 44, further comprising, after the real time
2 communication connection has ended, prompting the user to evaluate the information provider.

1 ~~47. (New) The method as described in claim 44, wherein the list includes a price for each~~
2 ~~information provider.~~

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1 48. (New) The method as described in claim 47, wherein the price includes a rate per
2 ~~period of time.~~

1 49. (New) The method as described in claim 44, wherein the list includes a user
2 evaluation rating.

50 50. (New) The method as described in claim 44, wherein the list is provided in response
2 to a keyword search.

51 51. (New) The method as described in claim 44, wherein the list is provided in response
2 to a category selection.

52 52. (New) The method as described in claim 44, wherein the real time communication
2 connection includes a voice connection.

53 53. (New) The method as described in claim 44, wherein the real time communication
2 connection includes a telephone connection.

54 54. (New) The method as described in claim 53, wherein the information provider and
2 the user each have a telephone number, and the real time communication connection is
3 established without disclosing the telephone number of the information provider to the user and
4 without disclosing the telephone number of the user to the information provider.

55 55. (New) The method as described in claim 44, further comprising, tracking how long
2 the real time communication connection is maintained between the information provider and the
3 user.

1 56. (New) The method as described in claim 55, further comprising, billing the user
2 based upon how long the real time communication connection is maintained.

1 57. (New) The method as described in claim 55, further comprising:
2 before providing the list, setting up an account for the information provider; and
3 crediting the account for an amount based upon how long the real time communication
4 connection is maintained.

1 58. (New) The method as described in claim 55, further comprising:
2 before providing the list, setting up an account for the information provider; and
3 crediting the account for an amount based upon how long the real time communication
4 connection is maintained minus a fee.

1 59. (New) The method as described in claim 44, further comprising, before providing
2 the list, setting up a user account for the user.

1 60. (New) The method as described in claim 59, wherein setting up the user account
2 includes obtaining credit card information from the user.

1 61. (New) The method as described in claim 59, further comprising:
2 tracking how long the real time communication connection is maintained between the
3 information provider and the user; and,

4 while the real time communication connection is being maintained, notifying the user in
5 real time of a balance in the user account.

1 62. (New) The method as described in claim 59, further comprising:
2 tracking how long the real time communication connection is maintained between the
3 information provider and the user; and
4 deducting from the user account an amount based upon how long the real time
5 communication connection is maintained.

1 63. (New) A system for connecting two parties in real time, the system comprising:
2 a communications interface; and
3 a controller computer being linked with the communications interface, the controller
4 computer having:
5 a database to store information about a plurality of information providers;
6 a first logic unit linked with the database to provide a list of information providers
7 to a user, the list including an indication of a current availability status for each
8 information provider; and
9 a second logic unit linked with the database to establish, in response to the user
10 selecting an information provider from the list and via the communications interface, a
11 real time communication connection between the user and the information provider.

1 64. (New) The system as described in claim 63, wherein the controller computer has a
2 third logic unit to prompt the user to provide an evaluation of the information provider after the
3 information provider and the user the real time communication connection has ended.

1 65. (New) The system as described in claim 64, wherein the evaluation is stored on the
2 database.

1 66. (New) The system as described in claim 63, wherein the first logic unit provides the
2 list of information providers in response to a keyword search.

1 67. (New) The system as described in claim 63, wherein the first logic unit provides the
2 list of information providers in response to a category selection.

1 68. (New) The system as described in claim 63, wherein the second logic unit changes
2 the indication of the current availability status for the information provider after the real time
3 communication connection between the user and the information provider has been established.

1 69. (New) The system as described in claim 63, wherein the second logic unit establishes
2 a real time voice connection between the user and the information provider.

1 70. (New) The system as described in claim 63, wherein the second logic unit establishes
2 a telephone connection between the user and the information provider.

1 71. (New) The system as described in claim 70, wherein the information provider and
2 the user each have a telephone number, and the second logic unit establishes the telephone
3 connection without disclosing the telephone number of the information provider to the user and
4 without disclosing the telephone number of the user to the information provider.

1 72. (New) The system as described in claim 63, wherein the controller computer has a
2 third logic unit to track how long the real time communication connection is maintained between
3 the user and the information provider.

1 73. (New) The system as described in claim 72, wherein the controller computer has a
2 fourth logic unit to bill the user based upon how long the real time communication connection is
3 maintained.

1 74. (New) The system as described in claim 72, wherein the database further stores
2 information about an account set up for the information provider, and the controller computer
3 has a fourth logic unit linked with the database to credit the account for an amount based upon
4 how long the real time communication connection is maintained.

1 75. (New) The system as described in claim 72, wherein the database further stores
2 information about an account set up for the information provider, and the controller computer
3 has a fourth logic unit linked with the database to credit the account for an amount based upon
4 how long the real time communication connection is maintained minus a fee.

1 76. (New) The system as described in claim 63, wherein the database stores information
2 about a user account set up for the user.

1 77. (New) The system as described in claim 76, wherein the information about the user
2 account includes credit card information obtained from the user.

1 78. (New) The system as described in claim 76, wherein the controller computer has:
2 a third logic unit to track how long the real time communication connection is maintained
3 between the user and the information provider; and
4 a fourth logic unit linked with the database to notify the user in real time of a balance in
5 the user account.

1 79. (New) The system as described in claim 76, wherein the controller computer has:
2 a third logic unit to track how long the real time communication connection is maintained
3 between the user and the information provider; and
4 a fourth logic unit linked with the database to deduct from the user account an amount
5 based upon how long the real time communication connection is maintained.

1 80. (New) A computer-readable medium having stored thereon instructions which, when
2 executed by a computer, cause the computer to:
3 provide a list of information providers, the list including an indication of a current
4 availability status for each information provider; and,

5 in response to a user selecting an information provider from the list, establish a real time
6 communication connection between the information provider and the user.

1 81. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 80, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to change the indication of the current
3 availability status for the information provider after the real time communication connection is
4 established.

1 82. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 80, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to prompt the user to evaluate the
3 information provider after the information provider has finished communicating with the user.

1 83. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 80, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to track how long the real time
3 communication connection is maintained between the information provider and the user.

1 84. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to bill the user based upon how long the real
3 time communication connection is maintained.

1 85. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to:
3 set up a user account for the user; and

4 notify the user in real time of a balance in the user account while the real time
5 communication connection is being maintained.

1 86. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to:
3 set up a user account for the user; and
4 deduct from the user account an amount based upon how long the real time
5 communication connection is maintained.

1 87. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to:
3 set-up an account for the information provider; and
4 credit the account for an amount based upon how long the real time communication
5 connection is maintained.

1 88. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further cause the computer to:
3 set-up an account for the information provider; and
4 credit the account for an amount based upon how long the real time communication
5 connection is maintained minus a fee.

1 89. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, wherein the
2 instructions stored thereon cause the computer to establish a real time voice connection in
3 response to the user selecting the information provider.

1 90. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 83, wherein the
2 instructions stored thereon cause the computer to establish a telephone connection in response to
3 the user selecting the information provider.

1 91. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 90, wherein the
2 information provider and the user each have a telephone number, and instructions stored on the
3 computer-readable medium cause the computer to establish the telephone connection without
4 disclosing the telephone number of the information provider to the user and without disclosing
5 the telephone number of the user to the information provider.

1 92. (New) A method of providing a connection between a user and an information
2 provider, the method comprising:

3 in response to the user selecting the information provider, establishing contact with the
4 information provider;

5 contacting the user after contact with the information provider has been established; and

6 connecting the user and the information provider to enable the user and the information
7 provider to communicate in real time.

1 93. (New) The method as described in claim 92, further comprising, after the
2 information provider and the user have finished communicating with each other, prompting the
3 user to evaluate the information provider.

1 94. (New) The method as described in claim 92, wherein the connection includes a voice
2 connection.

1 95. (New) The method as described in claim 92, wherein the connection includes a
2 telephone connection.

1 96. (New) The method as described in claim 95, wherein the information provider and
2 the user each have a telephone number, and connecting the user and the information provider is
3 accomplished without disclosing the telephone number of the information provider to the user
4 and without disclosing the telephone number of the user to the information provider.

1 97. (New) A system for providing a connection between a user and an information
2 provider, the system comprising:

3 a communications interface; and

4 a controller computer linked with the communications interface, the controller computer

5 having:

6 a first logic unit to establish contact with the information provider via the

7 communications interface in response to the user selecting the information provider;

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8 a second logic unit to contact the user via the communications interface after the
9 contact with the information provider has been established; and
10 a third logic unit to connect the user and the information provider to enable the
11 user and the information provider to communicate in real time.

1 98. (New) The system as described in claim 97, wherein the controller computer has a
2 fourth logic unit to track how long the user and the information provider are connected.

1 99. (New) The system as described in claim 98, wherein the controller computer has a
2 fifth logic unit to charge the user an amount based upon how long the user and the information
3 provider are connected.

1 100. (New) The system as described in claim 98, wherein the controller computer has
2 a fifth logic unit to credit the information provider an amount based upon how long the user and
3 the information provider are connected.

1 101. (New) The system as described in claim 97, wherein the connection includes a
2 voice connection.

1 102. (New) The system as described in claim 97, wherein the connection includes a
2 telephone connection.

1 103. (New) The system as described in claim 102, wherein the information provider
2 and the user each have a telephone number and the third logic unit connects the user and the
3 information provider without disclosing the telephone number of the information provider to the
4 user and without disclosing the telephone number of the user to the information provider.

1 104. (New) A computer-readable medium having stored thereon instructions which,
2 when executed by a computer, cause the computer to:
3 in response to a user selecting an information provider, establishing contact with the
4 information provider;
5 contacting the user after contact with the information provider has been established; and
6 establishing a connection between the user and the information provider to enable the
7 user and the information provider to communicate in real time.

1 105. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 104, having stored
2 thereon instructions that further causes the computer to prompt the user to evaluate the
3 information provider after the user and the information provider have finished communicating
4 with each other.

1 106. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 104, having stored
2 thereon instructions that cause the computer to establish a voice connection between the user and
3 the information provider.

1 107. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 104, having stored
2 thereon instructions that cause the computer to establish a telephone connection between the user
3 and the information provider.

1 108. (New) The computer-readable medium as described in claim 107, wherein the
2 information user and the user each have a telephone number, having stored thereon instructions
3 that cause the computer to establish the telephone connection without disclosing the telephone
4 number of the information provider to the user and without disclosing the telephone number of
5 the user to the information provider.